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Peace That Lasts
Proverbs 3:13-35 Sermon

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Do you ever have trouble falling asleep? There's one little boy in our house who doesn't always want to go to bed. Monica tucks him in but as soon as his head hits the bed he starts making noises telling her how much he doesn't want to go to sleep yet. He complains a little bit and sometimes he cries a little bit and sometimes he tosses Mr. Froggy out of bed... Monica keeps telling me to act more mature.

The National Sleep Foundation offers a couple tips for falling asleep:

1. Start winding down 30 minutes early. Read a book. Dim the lights.
2. Stop looking at your cellphone. The light tells you its daytime and keeps you awake.
3. Do a breathing exercise.
4. If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes get up and do something relaxing.
5. Get up at the same time every day, even on the weekends.

What keeps you up at night? What are you worrying about? Or who are you worrying about? A child, a parent, a friend, a coworker, yourself? Proverbs tells us how to get a good night's rest.

> **Proverbs 3:21, 24**
> 21 My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight,
> preserve sound judgment and discretion; […]
> 24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
> when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. (NIV)

One of the benefits of wisdom is sleeping well at night. I'm expanding my definition of wisdom today to believing and obeying God's words and ways. If we're filling our minds with God's words and living his ways we're much less likely to say or do something we'll feel anxious about during the middle of the night. That doesn't mean that wise people never sleep poorly but that a life of wisdom can help you sleep well.

We all need wisdom because we all need peace. We need something more than momentary rest. We need peace and rest that is durable. We need it in our hearts and minds and world. Did you know that we once had this kind of peace?

We had perfect peace in the garden. (Proverbs 3:13-18)

There's a connection between wisdom and peace and we find it in the Garden of Eden.

> **Proverbs 3:13-18**
> 13 Blessed are those who find wisdom,
> those who gain understanding,
> 14 for she is more profitable than silver
> and yields better returns than gold.
> 15 She is more precious than rubies;

nothing you desire can compare with her.
16 Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
17 Her ways are pleasant ways,
and all her paths are peace.
18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her;
those who hold her fast will be blessed. (NIV)

Did you see the connection between wisdom and peace and the garden? Wisdom is called the "tree of life," which is found in the Garden of Eden. Not only that, but in verse 13 "blessed are those" in the Hebrew is actually "blessed is the man" or "blessed is the 'adam…" Blessed is the man who finds wisdom (God's words and ways) because he has found the paths of peace and the tree of life.

Back in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world Adam and Eve had perfect peace with God. They lived and ate and walked in God's paradise but there was one condition. They could eat from any tree, including the tree of life, but they could not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

> **Genesis 2:9, 16-17** The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. […] 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (NIV)

So what do Adam and Eve do? Satan enters the garden in the form of a serpent, tempts them, and they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They disobey God, shattering their peace, and enter into a state of restlessness, brokenness, and sin. But there's a problem. They still have access to the tree of life and if they were to eat of that tree they would live forever in their sins. So what does God do? As an act of mercy God stops them from getting to the tree.

> **Genesis 3:22, 24** And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." […] 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (NIV)

God casts them out so that one day he can redeem them and heal all the brokenness. *We had perfect peace in the garden.*

Have you ever had a really good dream but something wakes you up midway through it? Like you're flying or spending time with loved ones, maybe even ones that have passed, but then you wake up. What's the first thing you try and do? You try and go back to sleep and pick up the dream where you left off. I used to be able to do that when I was a kid, but I can't anymore. Can any of you pick up on a dream where you left off? When Adam and Eve ate from that tree it woke them up to not a better reality but a nightmare. Ever since, all of humanity has been trying to get back what we lost. *We had perfect peace in the garden.* But good news. There is a way we can recapture a little bit of the dream of Eden.

Wisdom helps restore what we lost in Eden. (Proverbs 3:21-31)

When we reject wisdom we reject God and so we reject peace that lasts, and that's exactly what Adam did. He must have slept terribly that first night. But not all was lost. Solomon, the author of this part of Proverbs, writes that we can once again experience that peace through wisdom. Verses 17-18 say, "Her (Wisdom's)

ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her…" Through wisdom we restore two kinds of peace:

a) The peace we lost inside us (v21-26)

When we reject God's wisdom we lose peace between ourselves and God. That creates unrest and fear in our hearts. But there is a way to restore our relationship with God and get that internal peace back. Seek wisdom.

Proverbs 3:21-26
21 My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight,
preserve sound judgment and discretion;
22 they will be life for you,
an ornament to grace your neck.
23 Then you will go on your way in safety,
and your foot will not stumble.
24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid;
when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.
25 Have no fear of sudden disaster
or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,
26 for the LORD will be at your side
and will keep your foot from being snared. (NIV)

Notice in v26 how "Lord" is in all capitals, "LORD." This is God's special covenant name "Yahweh" God gave his people Israel so they could be in relationship with him and call him by his name. We need a relationship with God if we want peace that lasts. Otherwise while getting enough sleep might be helpful in the short term it won't provide that unshakable peace only God provides. *Wisdom helps restore the peace we lost inside us and…*

b) The peace we lost all around us (v27-31)

When we seek to be in relationship with God and do things God's way, it has the added benefit of restoring relationships with those around us.

Proverbs 3:27
27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
when it is in your power to act.

Verse 27 says that wisdom (God's words and ways) helps us avoid the "sin of omission." That's anytime we know we are supposed to do something good and do not do it. Have any of you said recently, "It's the thought that counts"? I've said it recently too. But that's not true and we should probably stop saying that. God says we're actually supposed to do the good thought (James 2:15-16). Wisdom also prevents us from the "sin of commission"—the sin of doing the wrong thing, which we find next.

Proverbs 3:28-31
28 Do not say to your neighbor,
"Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"—
when you already have it with you.
29 Do not plot harm against your neighbor,
who lives trustfully near you.
30 Do not accuse anyone for no reason—
when they have done you no harm.

31 Do not envy the violent
or choose any of their ways. (NIV)

Wisdom helps us not just avoid doing the wrong thing, or think about doing the right thing, but actually do the right thing. *Wisdom helps restore peace with God and peace with others*.

I want to give a small illustration of this from my own life. This often happens to me in parking lots. I see a piece of trash on the ground and I want to leave it there. I didn't litter why should I pick it up? Littering would be the sin of commission, of doing the wrong thing. But if I just leave the trash there am I missing an opportunity to do good? Am I committing the sin of omission? So sometimes I'll pick up the trash and throw it away. Now disclaimer—I don't pick every trash I see up. Otherwise I'd be in the parking lot all day. That's where wisdom kicks in. How much of my time should I use to do this good thing or maybe that other good thing, like parenting, or studying, or writing, or sharing Jesus or something else? Does picking up that trash help restore the Garden of Eden? In some small way I think it does. I think God takes eternal note of any good thing we do to honor and love him.

But can we by our efforts ever fully restore the Garden of Eden? Not yet. And any pastor or politician or business leader who tells you they can in this lifetime is sadly mistaken. If an angel is guarding the tree of life with a "flaming sword," there's no way we can get back there. But who can?

The Lord will restore the garden through Christ Jesus. (Proverbs 3:32-35, 19-20)

Proverbs 3:32-35
32 For the Lord detests the perverse
but takes the upright into his confidence.
33 The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked,
but he blesses the home of the righteous.
34 He mocks proud mockers
but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.
35 The wise inherit honor,
but fools get only shame. (NIV)

God promises to bless the righteous. But last time I checked if I'm a descendent of the first man, Adam, then I'm not upright. I'm perverse. I'm not righteous. I'm wicked. I'm not humble. I'm a mocker. I'm not wise. I'm a fool. This is why we need two verses I skipped over earlier and the big story of the Bible.

Proverbs 3:19-20
19 By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations,
by understanding he set the heavens in place;
20 by his knowledge the watery depths were divided,
and the clouds let drop the dew.

If you're not convinced wisdom can lead us back to the garden, you should be, because God created the world through wisdom itself. Wisdom is an attribute of God, a characteristic or description of who he is. God uniquely crafted all of creation through this aspect of himself. God is wisdom. It's a metaphor, a word picture. It's poetry. It's not that wisdom is God but that God is wisdom just like God is love. Wisdom is part of who God is. God is teh source of all wisdom. Proverbs 3:19-20 is a small snippet of a much more expansive passage in Proverbs 8 describing how God created everything through wisdom.

Proverbs 8:22-31

22 "The Lord brought me (wisdom) forth as the first of his works,
before his deeds of old;
23 I was formed long ages ago,
at the very beginning, when the world came to be.
24 When there were no watery depths, I was given birth,
when there were no springs overflowing with water;
25 before the mountains were settled in place,
before the hills, I was given birth,
26 before he made the world or its fields
or any of the dust of the earth.
27 I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
28 when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
29 when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.
30 Then I was constantly at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in his presence,
31 rejoicing in his whole world
and delighting in mankind.

God created everything through Wisdom. Paul then identifies who exactly wisdom is.

> **Colossians 1:15-17** The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (NIV)

Do you hear the similarities between Proverbs 3, Proverbs 8, and Colossians 1? Do you know what it's telling us? Jesus is wisdom! Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the wisdom of God. Jesus perfectly encapsulates God's attribute of wisdom. Jesus is wisdom incarnate, wisdom in the flesh (John 1:1-4, Hebrews 1:3). If Jesus is wisdom, how does this change how we read Proverbs three?

Proverbs 3:13-18 *Adapted

13 Blessed are those who find *Christ*,
those who gain understanding,
14 for *Christ* is more profitable than silver
and yields better returns than gold.
15 *Christ* is more precious than rubies;
nothing you desire can compare with *him*.
16 Long life is in *Christ's* right hand;
in *his* left hand are riches and honor.
17 *Christ's* ways are pleasant ways,
and all *his* paths are peace.
18 *Christ* is a tree of life to those who take hold of *him*;
those who hold *Christ* fast will be blessed.

(NIV; Jonathan's version) (changed where *italicized*)

How is this possible? Christ Jesus, through another tree, the cross, has taken our curse so that we who are wicked can become righteous (reversing v33 - "The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous."). Do you want peace that lasts? Christ. Do you want peace with God and peace inside your heart and mind and peace with your neighbors? Christ. Do you want eternal rest? Christ. Repent and believe in Christ. Christ is the second Adam, the last Adam, the final Adam who is taking us back to the garden. Or rather, forward to the garden. The prophet John saw it in his vision of the final day.

> **Revelation 22:1-2** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (that's Christ) 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (NIV)

The Lord will restore the garden and peace that lasts through Christ Jesus. I heard this illustration from Timothy Keller and I think it's a good way to end the sermon. Have you ever had a dream where something bad happens to the ones you love? A parent, or spouse, or child dies and there's nothing you can do about it? How do you feel? Empty. Sad. Heartbroken. It's a nightmare. But then you wake up… and you realize your loved ones are alive.

You roll over and see the one you love so much sleeping there, or you sneak into the other room and see your child sleeping peacefully in their crib. A wave of relief and peace and thankfulness washes over you. It was just a bad dream. When the final trumpet sounds and Christ comes down that's the kind of feeling you're gonna have. You'll wake up and the people you love who knew Christ will all be there. You'll be reunited with family and friends. The nightmare will be over and we will all have peace that lasts. *The Lord will restore the garden and peace that lasts through Christ Jesus*.

Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA on July 13th, 2019 when he served there as pastor. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon at archive.org or read an online version on Substack. Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min) degrees.

Discussion Questions

Questions for small groups, Bible studies, or personal devotionals:

1. What keeps you up at night?
2. What is peace? How would you explain it to a child?
3. What was so special about the Garden of Eden?
4. What is wisdom?
5. How can wisdom help restore the Garden of Eden?
6. How can Jesus provide wisdom?
7. Where do you need Christ's wisdom in your life right now?

Resource Recommendations

Some of the links in this manuscript are affiliate links ("aff link"), which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

How To Read Proverbs (affiliate link) by Tremper Longman III

The Book of Proverbs by BibleProject

Free Sermon Notes Worksheet (PDF)

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: Everyday Wisdom

Endnotes

Key stats paraphrased from: *What to do when you can't sleep*. National Sleep Foundation. https://www.sleepfoundation.org/insomnia/treatment/what-do-when-you-cant-sleep Accessed 7/9/2019.

Notice the solution to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not lack of knowledge. It's not that ignorance is bliss. You need wisdom through the tree of life.

If you're not convinced flip over to John 1:1-4 and Hebrews 1:3 and read how everything was made through the Word, Christ Jesus, who is the exact representation of God.

If you really want the wisdom of God, you have to know Christ. You can't know how this world works unless you have a relationship with God through Jesus. The Bible calls Jesus "the last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45). Jesus is the Adam who never ate from the wrong tree.

You can watch this sermon on YouTube.